

VZCZCXRO3686  
RR RUEHIK  
DE RUEHTI #0788/01 3451340  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 111340Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8657  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 000788

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EUR/SCE:JISMAIL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PINS](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: DOES ALBANIA NEED A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL?

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1. (SBU) Summary: Shortly after the March 2008 Gerdec tragedy, Prime Minister Sali Berisha announced his intention to create a National Security Council (NSC) to "coordinate the work of all agencies involved in security affairs." However, during the year and a half that followed, no action has been taken to carry out this goal. In recent weeks, several experts outside the government have lamented the lack of security expertise and coordination within the government and have revived the discussion of a need for a NSC. Although various competing executive bodies with responsibility for coordinating security affairs have existed since the fall of communism, none have a staff with the necessary expertise, nor do any meet on a consistent basis. With NATO membership, EU candidacy, heightened concerns over counter-terrorism and looming troop deployment decisions, the need for a coordinated security strategy developed by security experts will be felt all the more acutely. End Summary.

#### 1991 - THE PRESIDENT AND THE DEFENSE COUNCIL

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2. (U) While the first laws after the fall of "g,etfhs1 bbeated a Parliamentary government name, many of the executive powers concerning national security were assigned to the President. The President was the commander-in-chief of the military and as such could make personnel and strategy decisions for the military. The 1991 law established a "Defense Council" (DC) headed by the president and given the responsibility to "direct, organize and mobilize all forces and resources of the country for the defense of the homeland." The council included the Prime Minister, the Defense, Interior, Transportation and Economy Ministers, the Director of Intelligence (SHIK) and the Chief of the Military General Staff (CHOD). According to security expert Arian Dyrmishi, during the first several years, the DC was an active body under then-president Sali Berisha (now prime minister). The council largely focused on military affairs and did not address other areas of national security, such as law enforcement and the justice system. The DC had no permanent staff and relied strictly on the expertise of the respective ministers.

#### 1995 - THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE KPSK

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3. (U) In 1995, Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi established a rival security council under his direction named the Political Committee for National Security (KPSK), although the committee did not enjoy real authority and was not very active. It was initially established as an advisory body to the Council of Ministers and was comprised of many of the same persons sitting on the DC, adding the Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs. According to Dyrmishi, the KPSK took a more holistic approach to national security than the DC, but met very rarely, and had no permanent staff. According to one external assessment, the KPSK has no legal or constitutional

basis and thus, by law, no authority.

#### 1997 - CRISIS AND THE NSC

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¶4. (U) The 1997 crisis drastically changed the dynamics between the President and the Prime Minister. As the rival Socialists gained control of the Prime Minister's office, the KPSK became more active. A new constitution was passed in 1998 which drastically reduced the authority of the president, including authority to initiate draft laws. One role he did maintain was as commander-in-chief of the military, although now he exercised even this function through the Prime Minister. For example, while it is the President's responsibility to nominate or dismiss military commanders or to approve changes to the military structure, he must first receive a proposal for such from the Prime Minister.

¶5. (U) Along with these changes, the President's Defense Council was replaced by the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC maintained similar membership to the Defense Council, but it lacked any authority and became an advisory board, much like the Prime Minister's KPSK before 1997. Under Socialist President Rexhep Meidani, the NSC remained largely inactive. However, with the 2002 election of nonpartisan Alfred Moisiu, new life was breathed into the Council. During Moisiu's five-year tenure, the NSC met at least twice a year, especially to discuss matters concerning Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration, a special interest of Moisiu's. Yet the NSC still lacked a permanent staff or any decision-making authority.

During the same time, the Prime Minister's KPSK continued to meet regularly to discuss matters and now exercised authority to prepare decisions for the Council of Ministers (which was now the main executive body) on such matters as the regulation of movement across borders, counterterrorism, Euro-Atlantic integration, and the formulation of a national security strategy.

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#### 2000 - THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

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¶6. (U) Albania's first National Security Strategy was written in 2000. Consistent with the constitution, the document, approved by parliament, declared the President the highest authority on matters of national security, but delegated implementing authority to the Prime Minister and his Council of Ministers. The 2004 review of the strategy further eroded the authority of the President, transferring authority to review the National Security Strategy to the Prime Minister and his KPSK every three years. Since then, the Strategy has not been reviewed. Security expert Sotirag Hroni recently noted that the Strategy is largely written to please foreign donors and not out of an internal desire to meet security coordination needs. As anecdotal evidence of this attitude, he pointed out that a search on the internet for Albania's National Security Strategy will succeed in finding English versions of the document, but no Albanian versions. [Note. A few days after Hroni's comments, the Ministry of Defense published the Albanian-language version of the 2004 document on its website. End note].

¶7. (U) Various government departments have begun a review of the strategy in recent months. PM Advisor Avenir Peka has told Poloff of his intention to initiate a review. Deputy Foreign Minister Edith Harxhi has also shared with Post a draft rewrite of the strategy.

#### THE CURRENT SITUATION

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¶8. (U) Since the election of Bamir Topi as President in 2007, the NSC has only convened twice - once in September 2007 to discuss Kosovo, and once in March 2008 in reaction to the Gerdec tragedy. Since then, it has not convened. The President himself has no military advisor or national security advisor. These roles are covered by the president's diplomatic advisor Arben Cici, who readily admits his lack of expertise and resources in this area. This caused substantial delays when the Ministry of Defense proposed a force restructuring plan earlier this year. Partly for lack of

expertise, the President postponed review of the proposal for almost a year, finally approving the plan on December 9.

¶9. (U) Likewise, Prime Minister Berisha rarely convenes the KPSK, preferring to rely on the Council of Ministers to make decisions on matters of national security. Berisha, notorious for keeping his own counsel, does have a national security advisor (Avenir Peka), but he is a lawyer by profession and focuses almost exclusively on the legal aspects of security. Berisha's political advisor Glori Husi also covers military affairs, but has no military background, and no advanced education degree. Neither Husi nor Peka have any other staff.

COMMENT

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¶10. (SBU) In truth, neither the NSC nor the KPSK function as an effective security council, and coordination of security issues is at best ad hoc, most often motivated by foreign pressure (such as with the establishment of the International Maritime Operations Center). It is unlikely that Berisha will act on his almost two-year-old promise to establish a functioning NSC, as it is in his interest for respective ministries to have to rely on him personally for coordination. A good example of this is Berisha's management of the bilateral relationship with the U.S. - the MFA has only one real officer in the Americas Dept., with the entire bilateral relationship effectively managed by the PM and FM and almost no bureaucratic structure to support them. However, the lack of a coordination body will become more apparent and more detrimental as cross-cutting issues such as counter-terrorism and border security take center stage.